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The Rise & Fall Of Mike Awesome: The WWE Years

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Mike Awesome's run in WWF/E was a huge flop!!!

It's a pretty sad way to start off but, sadly, it's a fact.

Awesome's WCW contract was absorbed, as a part of WWF's purchase of WCW on March 23rd 2001, and, to be fair, his run started off pretty strong with a victory over Rhyno for the WWF Hardcore title, on June 25th 2001, which made him the first WCW 'invader' to capture a WWF title.

Shortly after that Awesome (kind of) re-joined ECW as a part of 'The Alliance' stable (alongside WCW), on July 9th 2001, and had started a feud with Edge which lead to a match between Awesome and Lance Storm facing Edge and Christian at WWF's 'InVasion' PPV, on July 22nd, and then, well, nothing.

Awesome was relegated to matches on shows like 'Sunday Night Heat' in which he was mostly on the losing end of his matches.

After sustaining an injury, in November 2001, Awesome would be out of action until July 2002 where he would return to the 'SmackDown' brand primarily competing on the brand's B-Show 'Velocity' losing to the likes of Faarooq, Bull Buchanan, Tajiri and Mark Henry.

The true nail in the coffin of his WWF/E run, came at the hands of a loss to Funaki, on 'Velocity', which pretty much killed any chance of Awesome being taken seriously within the company.

After a year and a half of jobbing, on B-Shows, Awesome was released by WWE on September 27th 2002. This moment is something he later stated in interviews was glad to be told as he hated it there.

So how did Mike Awesome's run with WWF/E become such a dud?

Well to get a better understanding of why his time in WWF/E failed so badly it's important to take a look back at his career, prior to that fateful day in March 2001, and fit the pieces together from there.

Awesome, in the early to mid 90's, was a pretty big deal in Japan's FMW (Frontier Martial-Arts Wrestling) promotion, under the name 'The Gladiator', where he became a 2-time Brass Knuckles Heavyweight champion and 1-time Independent Heavyweight champion.

Also during this time he made occasional appearances in ECW (then known as Eastern Championship Wrestling). During this stint he is most known for nearly crippling J.T. Smith at 'The Night The Line Was Crossed', on February 5th 1994, with a dive, over the top rope, which caused Smith's back to bend, on the guardrail, after landing.

Continuing his run in Japan, for both FMW and All-Japan Pro Wrestling (as well as brief appearances in Extreme Championship Wrestling in 1997 and 1998), Awesome was establishing himself as a monster!!!

Eventually, in September 1999, Awesome started his full time gig with ECW by winning the companies World Heavyweight title in a 3-Way Dance against Masato

Tanaka and Taz (who was the current champion and departing for the WWF) at that months 'Anarchy Rulz, PPV!!!

Awesome's time in ECW with the World title (a title he held twice during this run with the company) saw him presented as a true beast in the ring!!!

He smashed through the likes on Spike Dudley and New Jack, on PPV and television, which made him look like a truly unstoppable force!!!

He even managed to win the ECW World Tag Team titles, with Raven, during this period as well.

Unfortunately, like in most cases regarding ECW's financial state in 2000, Awesome wasn't always getting paid and decided to look at his next move.

On April 10th, 2000, Awesome made his WCW debut by attacking Kevin Nash on 'Monday Nitro'. This was a move Paul Heyman, and ECW, were completely unaware of and the incident was made even more controversial by the fact that WCW announcers called him the ECW World Heavyweight champion live on air!!!

After pursuing legal action it was agreed that Awesome would return to ECW and drop the title, at a house show, to Tazz (who was now a WWF employee).

This made Awesome a part of one of the most historic Pro Wrestling moments ever as it marked the first time a contracted WWF/E talent faced a contracted WCW talent at an ECW event!!!

After dropping the ECW World title he started his WCW run properly becoming a major part of the 'New Blood' faction and feuding with the likes of Kevin Nash, Hulk Hogan (who Awesome was actually related to), Diamond Dallas Page and Kanyon.

His run with WCW was going pretty well...but that's until the Vince Russo/Hulk Hogan incident at July's 'Bash At The Beach' PPV happened and Awesome's career would be affected throughout the rest of 2000!!!

After Hogan left WCW Awesome's career took a turn for the worse by first being given the 'Fat Chick Thriller' gimmick, shortly after 'Bash At The Beach', followed by 'That 70's Guy' in the September.

Awesome went from being a 'Career Killer', and facing off with WCW legends, to saving large women in distress and dressing as a 'groovy dude' from the 70's...WOW!!!

Luckily his next gimmick saw him transform back into something that resembled the Mike Awesome of the 90's as he joined Lance Storm's 'Team Canada' faction and became 'The Canadian Career Killer' in January 2001 (funnily enough not long after Russo was shown the door)!!!

After a few months in the faction, and slowly picking the pieces up from what had been a pretty strange run with the company so far, he seemed to be getting back to the old Mike Awesome...until March 23rd, 2001, when the WWF purchased WCW!!!

And so we end up back at the start of our post where Awesome's career, pretty much,

hit a low point from there onwards.

But how did he end up getting buried so badly in WWF/E and why didn't the company use him to his full potential?

Well I guess the best place to start would be, former ECW owner, Paul Heyman and his position within WWF/E at the time.

Heyman and Vince McMahon had a pretty strong working relationship dating back to the mid, to late, 90's and the arrival of Awesome, as a part of WCW, must have caused some issues after what he did to ECW in 2000!!!

We can't really imagine Heyman would have been too pleased with Awesome being moved over from WCW to the ECW section of 'The Alliance' as that's really where Awesome's push started to dwindle.

Upon Awesome's return, in 2002, Paul Heyman had become the booker for the 'SmackDown' brand (that Awesome had been drafted to whilst he was out with an injury) so the chances of him getting a decent run, at this time, was going to be extremely thin. Plus Heyman would have used this as an opportunity to truly bury Awesome so hence becoming a jobber on 'Velocity'.

Another point, that's worth mentioning, would have to be Awesome's poor run in WCW and the ridiculous gimmicks he was given by Vince Russo as these would have definitely hurt Awesome and made it difficult for a national audience to see him as the monster he had portrayed in Japan and ECW in the 90's.

Basically Russo punished Awesome for being related to Hulk Hogan (Awesome is the cousin of Horace Hogan who is Hulk's nephew) after what happened at 'Bash At The Beach' (something Awesome believed to be the case).

However our story of Mike Awesome doesn't end there.

After making appearances for NWA-TNA, MLW, All-Japan and Pro Wrestling NOAH, between 2002 - 2004, he did make one final appearance for WWE, on June 12th 2005, as a part of their ECW reunion PPV 'One Night Stand' facing off with long term foe Masato Tanaka in a match many consider an ECW classic and one that received a standing ovation from those in attendance.

Awesome retired in February 2006 saying he felt underpaid for his work at 'One Night Stand' and that he would only return "if the money was right".

Sadly a year later Awesome committed suicide and the world would never get the chance to see if he'd ever get to make that one last appearance in the ring.

Mike Awesome was a legend and an absolute machine in the squared circle but, unfortunately, the backstage politics hurt him along the way and because of that he never really become the superstar he deserved to be in the big leagues.

Guys like Paul Heyman and Vince Russo stopped Awesome from becoming something bigger due to there own issues, at the time, and truthfully that's pretty sad.

At least we can all take great comfort in knowing that Awesome's final contribution, to the world of Professional Wrestling, was his phenomenal performance at 'One Night Stand' which in turn made WWE offer him a full time contract...which he turned down.

NOW THAT IS AWESOME!!!

Rest in Peace Mike Awesome!!!

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